

Athenian News :

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Dunton's Oracle.

From **Saturday** May the 27th, to **Tuesday** May the 30th, 1710.

The Ignorant-Post, or an Essay proving we know nothing, or at most, nothing but Names.

THIS *Ignorant-Post* will be very surprizing to such conceited Fops as think they know every thing, when in Reality they know nothing, or at most, nothing but Names.

Our Misery is not of Yesterday, but as antient as the first Criminal, and the Ignorance we are involv'd in, almost coeval with the human Nature; not that we were made so by our God, but our selves; we were his Creatures, Sin and Ignorance were ours. To make Way for what follows, we will go to the Root of our antient Happiness, and now Ruins, that we may discover whence our Ignorance proceeds, and then (however strange the News may appear) give Instances and Proofs of it in every thing.

The eternal Wisdom having made that Creature whose Crown it was to be like his Maker, enrich'd him with those Ennoblements which were worthy him that gave them; and made no less for the Benefit of their Receiver, than the Glory of their Author. And as the Primogenial Light, which at first was diffus'd over the Face of the unfashion'd Chaos, was afterwards by the divine Appointment gather'd into the Sun and Stars, and other lucid Bodies, which shine with an undriv'd Lustre; so those scatter'd Perfections which are divided among the several Cantons of created Beings, were as it were constellated and sum'd up in this Epitome of the greater World, MAN. But Man, ever since the Fall of Adam, is become so very ignorant, that he knows nothing, or at most, nothing but Names. A Kind of Cloud is upon our Intellectuals, that they cannot discover the true Essence of Things with that Clearness as the *Protoplast*, our first Parents could; but we are involv'd in a Mist, and grope, as it were, ever since Adam's Fall, in the Dark, as if Truth were got into some Dungeon.

Tho' the Body work not without the Spirit, yet the Spirit is either compell'd, or inclin'd, or rather declin'd to evil Actions, by the Passions of the Body; wherefore they that handle *Astrology*, *Physiognomy*, and *Physick*, proceed sometimes certainly, and always probably; because of the mutual Sympathy and undivorceable De-

pendance of the Soul and Body. The like Proportions are to be found in Speech, wherein the Vowels resemble the Soul, the Consonants the Body. The greatest Vigour of Speech is seen in Names, concerning which I will declare, First, That all Knowledge comes by Deduction of them: Secondly, That all Error ariseth from Seduction by them.

Now then it is certain, that as it is in the Fable of the Fox, which lick'd only the Outside of the Glass, but could not come to the Pottage, so we know Names, but not Things; and from Names proceeds our Ignorance of every Thing. This was signify'd of Old by them that told how *Jupiter* was fed with Bones and Fat, *Prometheus* reserving unto himself the solid Flesh. By the Flesh is meant sound Knowledge, by the Fat, the fleeting Shew of superficial Terms of Art, by the Bones is decipher'd the inextricable and perplexed Labour in the Curiosities of ever-wrangling Contradictions. So *Ixion* embracing a Cloud for *Juno*, and *Narcissus* loving his own Shadow for a Water-Nymph, and *Paris* maintaining the Trojan War in the Defence of *Helena's* Idol, for *Helena* her self was conceiv'd by *Juno* to *Proteus* King of *Egypt*. All these declare that we are fed with the Shells, not with the Kernels of Learning, and as the common By-word goeth, whilst the blind and the lame Man have for their Portions the Shells of the Oyfter, the Lawyers Fees are the Flesh of the Fish. To conclude this Truth, consider that Fable of *Proserpina*, wherein it is avouch'd, that she for eating Seven Grains of a Pomegranate in the *Elysian* Garden, was made the Queen of Hell. To the opening of this Mythology, the *Turkish* Priests in their Alcaron do give us Light; for they say, that the forbidden Fruit was a Pomegranate, and that every Grain therein was of the Quantity of an Egg. The *French-men* at this Day call a Peach *un peche*, which they derive from *peccando*, as the *Latins* *malum* for an Apple hath great Affinity with *malum* for Evil: Now she that tasted this Apple, was before her Fall term'd *Isha*, (the *Egyptians* ignorantly call'd her *Isis*) which Name *Plutarch* expoundeth to signify Knowledge, and this was the Knowledge of Good and Evil, of Good by Deprivation, of Evil by Depravation, and late repenting Experience, the highest Note whereof is to know, that we know nothing but Names.

This Assertion I shall now bring to the Touch-stone; namely, to firm Reason. The first Argument is this: Every thing is either a Substance or an Accident: The

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Substance is a Wood, pierceable by no Star, for all Demonstration is of Accidents, seeing that the *major terminus* is a proper Effect, the *minor* is the Subject, the middle Extream is the Cause efficient, or final: Likewise all Definitions are of Accidents, for as much as they are enquir'd only by Demonstration, which indeed is to be turn'd into a Definition, as we see in the Nature of the Silk-worm, the Egg becomes a Worm, and the Worm in Time a Fly, so a Demonstration by altering of Terms is made a Definition. One Example will explain all. Where the Earth is interpos'd, there is a Deprivation of Light, or an Eclipse, but between the Moon and Sun, the Earth is interpos'd, in the Moon therefore there is an Eclipse. From this real Demonstration, by a real Metamorphosis, we collect this Definition, *An Eclipse is the Deprivation of Light in the Moon, made by the Interposition of the Earth between her and the Sun.* By this it appears, that Accidents only can be demonstrated and defin'd. Now every Accident is either Quantity, Quality, Action, Passion, or Relation; which last is nothing but a Term, or Name, impos'd by Art, and is extracted from the Foundation of the Four former Accidents, as great and little, from Quantity, better and worse, from Quality, Father and Son, from Action and Passion; now it shall appear that we know nothing but Relations, and consequently, nothing but *naked Names*. This is first evident in all Quantities, which by *Aristotle* are reputed Five; Magnitude, Time, Place, Number, Speech, as the Quantity of Syllables is therein consider'd. Magnitude is Length, Breadth, Thickness: Now to leave the Mathematicians to their Nightly Speculations, I request all active Wits to tell me, what they do understand in Length, but a certain Name of Difference from Breadth and Thickness; and what is Magnitude but an Accident of the Matter? How can Matter be distinguish'd from the Form by an essential Difference, considering Difference of Difference cannot be assign'd, except we will run out into infinite Labyrinths. And as for Time, is it ought but a Name, respective of that which is pass'd and to come? So that certainly about this Flower, or rather about the Smell thereof, many have distill'd out the Flower of their best Time. Concerning Place, it hath so many Bones, that we have need of Cranes to pluck them out of the Throats of Philosophers. *Scaliger*, after many Meanders and Excursions, saith, *Locus est vacuitas Corporis subituri*, Place is an Emptiness capable of a Body that shall enter or succeed. I pray you what is this but *Medea's* empty Casket, setting *Crysa* with her House on Fire. Now for Number, it is most spent in Cyphers, Places, Names. Lastly, For Speech: What Sinews can we expect from it? Is it not like the Ghost in *Homer*? ὅς ποτε ἔτι σαρκὸς ἔσται, ὅτεα ἔτι ἔσται?

*For now no longer Sinews hold,
The Flesh and Bones being waxen old.*

Thus much of Quantity. Now Quality consisteth all in Degrees, which are nothing but Respects, Respects are nothing but Relations, Relations nothing but Names. As for Action and Passion, they are so nearly relative, that *Aristotle* saith, they differ no more than the Way from *Thebes* to *Athens*, and from *Athens* to *Thebes*. Thence we conclude, that as the Thunder many times destroyeth the Sword, leaving the Scabbard untouched, so the

Substance and Reality of all Knowledge is suck'd out, like the Eggs of the Crocodile, by the Icnumon, and nothing left for our Inheritance but Shells, Sheaths, and Names.

The Second Argument, to prove that we know nothing, may be thus fram'd, viz. either we know the Being, (which nice Wits have call'd the Essence) or the Manner of Being, which Schoolmen abounding with Leisure, rather than Learning, have call'd Existence. The Being is unknown, like the Head of *Nilus*, in the Mount of *Atlas*, for who dares aver, that he knows the Matter and Form of an Accident, except he would be confin'd to the Isle of *Antifera*, to have his Brain purg'd with *Helebore*? As for the Existence, or Manner of subsisting, is it not a Notional and Relative Term? cramming a Man with Learning, as Promises do with Hope, and what are Terms but Names? So that to conclude, as in the City of *Brutus*, they that consulted with the Oracle of *Latona*, after they had slept before her Image, did by the first Word of the next that met them, gather a Prediction. So when Masculine Promises of real Knowledge are made, we are turn'd off at last with Feminine Performance, in Reversion of Words; so that the Distinction of the Two Sects of Schoolmen, real and nominal, is now confounded.

The Third Reason doth thus ratify the Matter, that we know nothing, or at most, nothing but Names. All Knowledge is by Species and Shews, call'd intelligible, which are prov'd by *Scaliger* to be meer Accidents; but if we sift it further, we shall find them to be nothing but Names, or Notions, presented to the Understanding; for Colours, Sounds, Smells, Tasts, and Qualities of Touching, offering themselves to the common Sense, are carry'd into the inner Closet of the Fancy, in whose Mirror they are represented to the simple Understanding; which first conceiving them as single Terms, maketh of them Seven Spiders Webs: First, Compounding and dividing. Secondly, Reasoning and discoursing. Thirdly, Resting, or agreeing. Fourthly, Deliberating and consulting. Fifthly, Chusing. Sixthly, Reflecting by the Faculty of Conscience. Lastly, Desiring and moving. So that to gather the total Sum, these Species, which we call intelligible, are but Terms gather'd into sundry Forms, as of the same Watry Vapour are made many Meteors, a Cloud, a Rain-bow, also Rain, Hail, and Snow; so of the same Names variably fram'd, issue not new Things, but new Appearances. By this it is clear that the Quotum of all our Knowledge consisteth in a small Number of broken Names, which we may call *reliquia Danaum*, atq; *immitis Achilli*: The Relicks of Man's Fall, wherein the Wings of the Soul were so clipp'd, that were they not repair'd by *Dedalus*, who hath his Name from *Dalio* to know, she should always have flag'd upon the Fens of base Mortality.

The Fourth Argument to prove we know nothing, may be thus worded: All Knowledge is by some Argument, for the Latin, *arguere*, to argue, is deduc'd from the Greek, ἀργός, white or clear, whence is drawn ἀργένιον, *argentum*, Silver, 'tis now not material whose Method we insist upon, whether of *Ramus* the Bough, or *Aristotle* the Root, by either Clew we may get out of the Labyrinth; let us therefore assume, for Example sake, any sort of Argument, as *causa*, *causatum*, vulgarly call'd *effectum*, *subiectum*, *accidens*, lately entitl'd *adjunctum*, and we shall find, that all their Knowledge is by Relation of Terms.

Terms. For as all Men acknowledge there are Four Causes, Efficient, Matter, Form, End, so the most learn'd have form'd Four *Causata*, or Products of Causes, *Effectum, Materialum, Formatum, Destinatum*, which do mutually answer to the Causes, like the Cords of Musick, and what are these but Names and new Notions? The same may be observ'd in the proportionable Differences of *Subjectum* and *Accidens*. For as at *Philbets* in *Egypt*, of Camel's Dung and a soft Fire, they make Chickens to be hatch'd from Eggs which are there set; so Man's Mind being well temper'd, from one relative Term frameth another, far surmounting both the Skill and Felicity of them, which extract the Spirit of Roses, Wine, yea, and all Chymical Impositions. Shall we think the like is not to be seen in Arguments of less Moment? What are Reasons drawn from disagreeing, Comparison, from Name, Division, Definition, Testimony, but a Heap of *Ænigmatical* Terms, overgrown with Distinctions, as *Archimides* Tomb was with Thorns, when *Cicero* came to visit it? Wherefore if all Knowledge be of Accidents, and those are relative, if we only know the Manner of being, not the Being of Things in Nature, if all shews intelligible, and Arguments be but Accidents in Relation, that is meer Names, it remains that we only feed upon the Thistles of Names, howsoever we seem to carry upon our Backs most precious Merchandize.

Thus having fully prov'd we know nothing, or at most, nothing but Names, I shou'd next (however strange the News may appear) give Instances and Proof of it in every thing; but for want of Room, this must be the Subject of a Second *Ignorant-Post*; to which I shall add a merry Character of a Dunce.

The Casuistical-Post, or Athenian Mercury.

Quest. In the Case of a scrupulous Conscience, what is to be done?

Ans. A Scruple being only a light Doubt or Fear, having no Ground or Foundation, we are advis'd (if it cannot be remov'd otherwise) to neglect it, and proceed to Action, that is, to proceed to do that which we scruple, whether it may be done or no. As if, considering our own great Unworthiness, we dare not presume to make known our Requests to God by Prayer, or to approach to receive the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of our dear Lord; we are advis'd, notwithstanding these Scruples, to put our selves upon Prayer, and to prepare our selves for the receiving the holy Sacrament, and so to eat of that Bread, and drink of that Cup. In like manner, if we have some Scruples whether we can safely obey some Command of our Superiours, we are in this Case to neglect those Scruples; not to neglect our Duty, and refuse to obey. Every such Scruple shou'd be plainly told, that we will not omit our Duty for it. We are advis'd also, as much as we can, to avoid thinking of those Things which occasion such groundless Scruples, and not to dispute the Question long with them, whether we may safely do that which we are about or no. We should also pray earnestly unto God, that he will rebuke Satan, and not suffer him to create so much Trouble and Disquiet to us, by casting these Scruples into our Minds. As likewise we shou'd diligently search and examine our selves to find out the Sin or

Sins which may have provok'd God to suffer this Affliction to fall upon us, and repent more earnestly, and be more heartily sorry for them. Also, that we may fear Trifles, or little Things less, let us fear great Things more; yea, let us fear every known Sin, whether small or great. Let us also get our Hearts more firmly establish'd as to that which we are to do, and then not admit every slight and groundless Fear of the contrary. And because these Scruples do often arise from Melancholy, it may not be amiss to make use of the proper Remedies for the Cure of that Distemper. Lastly, We are advis'd, as much as may be, to avoid the Company of scrupulous Persons.

Q. Whether may such as are call'd Lay-persons, or private Men, administer Baptism?

A. Ministers of the Word only may do it. For to baptize is a part of the publick Ministry, *Mat. 28. 18.* where Preaching and Baptizing are joyn'd together; and Things that God hath joyn'd may no Man separate. He that performs any part of the publick Ministry must have a lawful Call, *Rom. 10. 14. Heb. 3. 5.* but private Persons have no Call to this Business. Again, what soever is not of Faith is Sin: Now for private Persons to baptize, is not of Faith; for they have neither Precept nor Example for it in the Word of God, therefore it's Sin.

Obj. But *Zipporah* circumcis'd her Child, *Exod. 4. 28.*

A. The Example is many ways discommendable: For she did it in the Presence of her Husband, when there was no Need. She did it in Hast, that she might prevent her Husband. She did it in Anger, for she cast the Fore-skin at his Feet; and it seems she was no Believer, but a meer *Midianite*; for she condemn'd Circumcision when she call'd her Husband a Man of Blood, because of the Circumcision of the Child, *v. 26.* and in Respect it seems *Moses* either sent her back, or she went away when he went down into *Egypt*. Some others think, that *Moses* was so stricken by the Angel, that he was unable to do it; yet her Fact was not justifiable.

Obj. A private Person may Teach, and therefore Baptize.

A. Private and ministerial Teaching are distinct in Kind, as the Authority of a Magistrate, and a Master of a Family are distinct Authorities. A private Person, as a Father, or Master, may instruct his Children and Servants; but he doth it by the Right of a Father, or Master, being so commanded by the Word of God; but Ministers do it authoritatively by Virtue of their Calling and Office, as Ambassadors in the stead of Christ, *2 Cor. 5. 21.*

Q. What kind of Bodies is it that Angels take when they assume Human Shape? are their Bodies fram'd of nothing, or of pre-existent Matter then form'd, or do they possess and act Natural Bodies already made?

A. One manner of Angels appearing hath been in Dreams, another in Visions, the Third in Assumption of Bodies, and that either of Bodies form'd of nothing, or of pre-existent Matter then form'd, or possessing and acting Natural Bodies already made.

Some have thought there hath been no Assumption of Bodies, but only an Appearance to the Fancy and Imagination; but that must needs be otherwise, for whatever is a Substance which is not a Body, nor hath a Body naturally united, and yet is sometime seen with a bodily Sight or Vision, must needs take up a Body; and farther,

this was not an imaginary and fantastical Apparition, because such an Imagination is not seen by the Senses without, but by the Fancy within.

2. An imaginative Sight being only within in the Imagination, consequently appears to him only which so sees it, but that which is seen by the Eyes, because it exists without, and not within the Mind, may be seen also of others; such Apparitions were of the Angels that appear'd to *Abraham*, to *Lot*, and to the Men of *Sodom*, who were seen by them, and indifferently by all.

Obj. But if you object, to what End was this Assumption of Bodies, since the Power of Angels exceeds all bodily Might?

A. The Angels assum'd Bodies for the manifesting themselves, not for the doing of their Work; but that they might familiarly speak with Men without their Terror and Dread. *Aquinas* gives other Reasons, that they might manifest the intelligible Society and Converse which Men expect with them in another Life: And in the Old Testament, that it was a certain figurative Declaration, that the Word of God shou'd take Human Flesh, for all Apparitions in the Old Testament were in order to that Apparition of the Son of God in the Flesh: If you ask me what kind of Bodies they took, and whether they were true Men or no, in taking Human Shapes? I answer, First, Tho' they appear'd in a Human Shape, they were not true Men, as Christ was a true Man, because he was personally and hypostatically united; but Bodies were not united to the Angels as to their Form, nor was the Human Nature, Body and Soul, united to the Person of any Angel, but they took Bodies to them as Garments, which they took up and laid down upon Occasion.

If you ask of what those Bodies consisted? It is likely of some of the Elements, as of the Air. And if you object, that the Air is improper to take Figure or Colour, because 'tis so thin and transparent? The Answer is, That altho' the Air remaining in its Rarity doth not retain Figure or Colour, yet when 'tis condens'd and thicken'd, it will do both, as appears in the Clouds. Another way of Appearing was in possessing some Natural Body, so the Devil enter'd into the Serpent, and an Angel spake in *Balaam's* Ass; so you read often of Men possess'd with evil Angels, the Men spake not, but the Devil in them; the like may be said often of the good.

Now if any shou'd ask what becomes of those Bodies? I answer, If they be created of nothing, they are reduc'd into nothing by the Power of God: But if they be form'd of pre-existent Matter, the Work being done for which they were taken up, they are resolv'd again into their Elements, or Principles; but if the Bodies were natural, real and existent before, they were left so again by the departing of the Angels, so was *Balaam's* Ass, and many Bodies possess'd by the Devils, cast out by Christ.

Another Consideration is, Whether the Angels, having assum'd those Bodies, did put forth Acts of Life? Whether they Spake and Sang, or Eat and Drank, as they seem'd to do? This is handl'd with much Controversy; but 'tis certain they did what they seem'd to do, as appears by the plain direct Story of *Moses* concerning the Angels that appear'd to *Abraham*, and others; and this is assur'd, that whatever the Angels appear'd to have, or do, that they had, and did, for they never deceiv'd your Senses, their Colour, their Shape, their Eating, their

Drinking, their Speaking, was what it seem'd to be; for the Senses are not deceiv'd about their Objects, if the Distance be proportionable, and they no way distemper'd; for if the Senses are ordinarily capable of being deceiv'd, then you may question any thing subjected to Sense, as whether the Snow be white, &c. Now all this they did, not by Virtue of an internal Form, but an Angelical Power, quickning and moving the Body they acted; and 'tis observable, that when the Angels would hide their Nature, that they might Converse more familiarly with Men, they would Eat and Drink, and Speak; but when they would be acknowledg'd for Angels, then they deny'd to eat Meat, as *Judges* 6. in the Story of *Gideon* and *Sampson*, *Judges* 13. If you ask, What became of the Meat they Eat, for their assum'd Bodies needed no Nourishment? I would ask you, What became of their Bodies? Their Meat as well as their Bodies was reduc'd to nothing, or the pre-existent Elements of which they consisted, as that which Christ eat after his Resurrection.

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